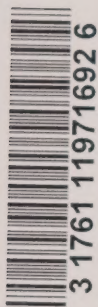


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**MALE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN:  
THE BRUTAL FACE OF INEQUALITY**

A Brief to the  
House of Commons Subcommittee  
on the Status of Women

February 13, 1991

Canadian  
Advisory Council  
on the Status of Women



Conseil  
consultatif canadien  
sur la situation de la femme



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## PREAMBLE

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (the Council/CACSW) was established in 1973 on the recommendation of the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada. The CACSW is composed of twenty-seven part-time and three full-time members appointed by the federal government. Collectively, Council members represent the regional, cultural, occupational, racial, and ethnic diversity of Canada as well as the two official languages.

The CACSW's mandate is to advise the federal government and inform the public on matters of interest and concern to women. Thus, the Council provides the government with advice on the impact on women of existing or proposed policies and programs; undertakes and publishes research on issues of interest and concern to women with the view to achieving needed reform; informs the general public on key issues; promotes an awareness of these issues through public and media relations; and contributes to the development of a substantive body of Canadian resource material on women's issues.



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## INTRODUCTION

Events of the past year have alerted women, men, and children across Canada to the undeniable reality that violence, fear, and the threat of violence are facts of life for women in this country. The Montreal massacre, in which fourteen young women engineering students were brutally murdered because they were women and because they were perceived by Marc Lépine to be feminists, heightened our awareness of the vulnerability of women to violence. The massacre raised questions about the extent of violence against women in Canada and generated debate around the values and beliefs used to justify the murders. The urgency of this debate has increased as case after case of brutality against women and female children has come to public attention.

The shock of many recent violent events has helped raise awareness that violence is very much a part of our society and that, in particular, violence against women is a burden that women have shared for centuries. It is a burden that women have too often suffered in silence.

In presenting this brief, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women has three goals: to ensure that women's voices are heard, to make known the threat of violence women live with daily and to stop the denial of this violence, and to recognize and evaluate ongoing efforts to prevent violence against women. Ultimately, we must work toward a comprehensive and effective strategy to prevent violence against women.



## BACKGROUND

### The CACSW's Work on Violence Against Women

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, over the past eighteen years, has taken a leadership role in raising the issue of male violence against women, ensuring that the voices of women are heard, educating the public about the pervasiveness and reality of violence, and stressing the urgent need for preventive action.

The CACSW has played a vital role in raising public awareness about the seriousness of wife assault. In 1980, the Council published *Wife Battering in Canada: the Vicious Circle*, the first report to present national information about this issue. Seven years later, the CACSW published a second book, *Battered But Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Battering in Canada*. In 1989, the Council hosted a think-tank to explore effective ways to prevent woman abuse. The participants included twelve women from different perspectives and backgrounds (front-line workers, policy-makers, and advocates) who work with the victims of violence. The published report of their discussion is titled *Preventing Wife Battering: Towards a New Understanding*.<sup>1</sup>

The Council has made numerous recommendations on issues related to violence against women. These include wife battering (shelters and transition houses, second-stage housing, programs for children and adolescents, prevention and public education, doubly disadvantaged women, and programs for batterers), violence against children, and prostitution. Almost a decade before sexual assault legislation was put in place in 1983, the CACSW recommended more equitable legislation and treatment within the criminal justice system for women victims. In addition, between 1984 and 1987, the Council made many recommendations encouraging more effective control of pornography within Canada as well as more stringent importation regulations.



## The CACSW Perspective on Violence Against Women

In all these initiatives, the Council has taken great care to reflect women's perceptions and experiences. The CACSW has ensured that its recommendations responded to women's needs or concerns and that its definitions of violence mirrored women's experiences.

As a result, the Council has always approached violence against women as a multi-faceted problem integrally linked to the social, economic, and political inequalities women experience as part of their daily lives. In an attempt to respond effectively to the well-entrenched roots of violence, the CACSW's actions have been based on the recognition that although crisis intervention and short-term support for victims/survivors of violence are crucial, they are not enough to prevent the violence. Structural and attitudinal change are also needed. Accordingly, the Council's recommendations responding to the immediate needs of women have always been partnered with others encouraging long-term prevention through structural and attitudinal change.

Looking to the future, the research underway or planned by the CACSW over the next three years reflects this perspective on violence. It presents a vision for change which recognizes that violence is part of the very fabric of women's lives and cannot be separated from health, economic, social, housing, child care, or justice concerns. For example, this approach has been integrated into an upcoming study of policies and programs designed to improve women's health and well-being. The Council has defined well-being to include a sense of personal power and an understanding that freedom from physical violence and pervasive fear is clearly a requisite for well-being.

In future Council work (see *Researching for Equality: The CACSW 1990-93 Action Plan*), this vision of change will be reflected together with a stress on the violence implicit in silencing women and ignoring their perspectives and wisdom. In keeping with this conviction, the Council plans to release results of a survey of young women from grades eight to ten in Canada to uncover their attitudes, concerns, goals, interests, and the influences and issues they identify as important, including the impact of violence in their lives.

In addition, the CACSW continues to study the ways our justice system treats women who are victims/survivors of violence, and how the law interprets violence against women. A study on the legal aspects of sexual assault is now underway as part of the Council's ongoing monitoring of the government's evaluation of the 1983 sexual assault legislation.

## THE PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS BRIEF

In this brief, the CACSW will build on its past work and on its current perspective that violence is perhaps the most visible, dramatic, and potentially deadly manifestation of the inequality women experience as part of their daily reality. Throughout this brief, the Council will:

- focus on women's experiences and understanding of violence;
- present a vision for change built on a multi-faceted approach to violence which responds to women's needs and which recognizes that violence is a pervasive and virulent manifestation of women's inequality in our society;
- stress the urgency of real long-term prevention as well as action addressing immediate needs, thereby facilitating the design of effective solutions to stop the violence;
- focus on male violence against women, whether systemic or manifested by individual situations;
- reiterate past Council recommendations on violence against women which have not yet been implemented;
- make new proposals to prevent violence against women.

This brief will concentrate on woman abuse and to a lesser extent on sexual assault and pornography; these are the aspects of violence on which the CACSW has done the most research.



However, these specific concerns will be placed within a broader framework of the CACSW's work aimed at reducing women's economic, social, and political inequality. A comprehensive approach to violence is only possible in the context of reducing men's dominance over women, asserting different women's realities, and encouraging women's participation in decision making.

The physical, psychological, economic, and social costs of violence against women will also be briefly considered, as will current information on the nature and antecedents of violence against women. This information will be used to help support recommendations and proposals included in this brief.

## THE DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE USED THROUGHOUT THIS BRIEF

In keeping with the past, current, and planned work of the CACSW, a consistent definition of violence against women will be used throughout this brief.

**Violence against women is a multifaceted problem which encompasses physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violations of women and which is integrally linked to the social/economic/political structures, values, and policies that silence women in our society, support gender-based discrimination, and maintain women's inequality.**

## UNDERSTANDING MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### The Range of Physical and Sexual Violence Women Suffer

Available statistics on violence against women reveal that physical and sexual violence against women is so prevalent in our society that the majority of women can expect to be the victims of some form of violence at some time in their lives. In fact, women are **more** likely than men to be victims of serious violence, and men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of violence.



Although official police statistics indicate that men are more at risk of violent attack than are women, women's actual and greater vulnerability to serious violence becomes clear when unreported incidents of violence, revealed through victimization surveys, are added to reported incidents.

In fact, we know from the direct statements of women gathered through Canadian victimization surveys that:

- one in four women can expect to be sexually assaulted at some time in their lives, half before the age of seventeen;<sup>2</sup>
- at least one in ten women is physically and/or sexually assaulted each year by her husband, ex-husband, or live-in partner.<sup>3</sup> These physical assaults include such actions as kicking, biting, hitting with a fist, beating, threatening with or using a knife or a gun. All these actions are chargeable assaults. While husband battering does exist, the most liberal estimates are that the husband is the victim in no more than 5% of all assaults by one spouse against another;<sup>4</sup>
- women, like men, are also assaulted by strangers and acquaintances. Approximately 100,000 women each year are victims of assault by someone other than their husbands or ex-husbands.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, the rate of stranger assault is higher for men (79 per 1,000 men compared to 39 per 1,000 women), but the number of men assaulted by strangers does not come close to equalling the number of women assaulted by their husbands or partners in their homes, nor does it mirror the repetitiveness of the violence suffered by so many battered women.

In addition to data derived from victimization surveys, we also know from official police statistics that in 1989:

- 12,970 sexual assaults were known to the police (the victim was a woman in at least 90% of these cases);<sup>6</sup>
- 76 women were killed by their husbands, compared to 22 men killed by their wives;<sup>7</sup>
- of the total number of adults and juveniles charged by the police for crimes of violence, 89% were males.<sup>8</sup>

## **Patterns of Physical and Sexual Violence Against Women**

The above statistics reveal a number of patterns demonstrating that women's experiences of violence are considerably different from those of men.

### **1. Women are much more likely than are men to be attacked by relatives, friends, and acquaintances**

By definition, wife battering is the assault of a woman by someone known to her, namely her husband, ex-husband, or live-in partner. However, women are also frequently sexually assaulted or robbed by someone they know casually or as a friend. According to the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey, at least 41% of all sexual assaults involve victims and assailants known to one another. In addition, this same survey revealed that women are slightly more likely than are men to be robbed by acquaintances and relatives.<sup>9</sup>

### **2. Women are more likely to be victimized in their own homes**

When women are the victims of assault by their spouses, it almost always occurs in the home. Half of all rapes are committed in the victim's home.<sup>10</sup> As well, women are even more likely than are men to be robbed in their homes: 29% of robberies of women occurred in their homes or in the homes of friends compared to 12% for men.<sup>11</sup>

### **3. Women are more likely than are men to be victims of repeated, ongoing violence**

By definition, wife battering is ongoing violence over a prolonged period of time. Incest also tends to be a form of repeated violence. In addition, anecdotal evidence indicates that women who are robbed by friends and acquaintances or who are sexually assaulted by friends or acquaintances, often do not acknowledge the violence or theft as a crime until it has been repeated several times.

#### 4. Women's victimization is linked to their relative inequality in our society

According to the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey, women with low household incomes, low levels of education and/or who are unemployed are at highest risk of being sexually assaulted. In addition, as women become older, they become prime targets for purse snatching, while the risk of robbery declines for older men.<sup>12</sup>

Racial and ethnic minority women, as well as Aboriginal and disabled women, also experience high rates of violence. For example, 80% of surveyed Aboriginal women on reserves had been abused or assaulted, according to a 1989 study by the Ontario Native Women's Association.<sup>13</sup> A study by the Disabled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN) revealed that 53% of women who had been disabled from birth, and 40% of all respondents including women who had become disabled later in life, had been raped, abused, or assaulted.<sup>14</sup> For many immigrant and refugee women, the isolation of abuse is compounded by language and cultural barriers, by racism, and by the fact that many immigrant and refugee women are separated by great distances from their friends and their extended families. Some immigrants, because of their past experiences in authoritarian countries, are leery of police.

Research reported in 1990 by the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women makes clear the prevalence of abuse suffered by women members of oppressed or disadvantaged groups. The researchers found that 80% of all federally sentenced women said they had been physically or sexually abused, 68% said they had been physically abused, and 54% spoke of being sexually abused by people they trusted. Among Aboriginal women who were federally sentenced, abuse was even more prevalent. Ninety per cent of the Aboriginal women said they had been physically abused, usually on a regular basis over long periods of time, compared to 61% of non-Aboriginal women surveyed.<sup>15</sup>



## Violence Against Women is Not Only Physical

The characteristics of male violence against women summarized above indicate that it is not only physical and/or sexual. Women are also the victims of psychological and economic violence, usually by their husbands or partners or by someone else in a relationship of trust to them. Economic and psychological violence, which sometimes act as warning signs of future physical and other types of violence, are important elements of woman abuse. For example, when the number of cases of psychological and economic abuse is added to the number of physical and sexual abuse cases reported earlier, the likelihood of women being abused by their husbands or partners rises to about one in seven. When psychological, verbal, economic, physical, and sexual abuse are all included in a definition of wife or woman abuse, approximately one million women are abused each year in Canada.<sup>16</sup>

Although no comparable figure is available for men, the ratio is probably similar to women's ratio for physical and sexual assault. Men as a group are more economically independent than are women, and therefore are not as prone to financial abuse. As well, because men generally have more social and political power than do women, they are less vulnerable to psychological abuse.

The importance of psychological and economic violence cannot be underestimated, particularly given women's vulnerable and unequal position. In fact, many women who have been physically and psychologically abused by their husbands stress that the psychological violence is far worse. As one woman said:

It was the name calling, being treated like dirt, never knowing what to expect that really got me down. Your body heals, but always being attacked as a person, as a woman . . . , that destroys your soul and confuses your mind. You start to become hopeless, helpless. You become the pathetic creature he always thought you were.

Psychological violence also extends to the silencing of women as a societal group (i.e., through the denigration of women's knowledge and experiences), and to discrimination against women on the basis of gender. The historical tendency to deny the extent of the violence against women is one example of this broader societal form of psychological violence. Increasingly, women working with battered women are identifying socially-based psychological violence as part of the backlash against women's attempts to protect themselves from violence. For example, in January 1989, a decision by the Supreme Court of Ontario proclaimed that shelters for battered women and their children were unsuitable for children. Shelter workers in Ontario report that, increasingly, fathers' rights groups are arguing in courts that shelters are not suitable places for their children, either in an attempt to obtain custody or to deny custody to their wives. Through this action, the courts have given men who are violent towards their wives a tool to make women fearful of using their most effective — and often most available — option to escape the violence. Many women also speculate that the more general backlash against feminism, including the accusation that women are responsible for their own subjugation, is another manifestation of the high level of psychological and structural violence against women.

## **Violence Against Women has Long-term Costs**

### **1. The direct costs for the women themselves**

The physical and psychological effects of violence are pronounced. Violence has profound effects on women's well-being and tends to increase their relative inequality. For every type of victimization, women are more likely than are men to suffer physical and/or psychological injury. Even female victims of robbery are more likely to be injured than are male victims.<sup>17</sup> Victims of sexual assault are injured in at least 60% of the cases, 20% badly enough to require medical attention.<sup>18</sup> Approximately 60% of women physically or sexually assaulted by their husbands or partners are injured in the attack.<sup>19</sup> And the injuries suffered by women through violence are serious enough to affect their ability to function both at home and at their paid work. In one study, 15% "were incapacitated for up to 5 days, 19% for 20 days, and 18% for 3 weeks

or more".<sup>20</sup> In the CACSW studies on wife battering, many women also reported that they suffered permanent disabilities as a result of their abuse, usually back injuries and hearing loss.

Victims/survivors of sexual assault and/or wife abuse suffer from chronically low self-esteem, they stop taking care of their appearance and their health, they blame themselves for the violence, and they feel overwhelming guilt. Women who have been victims of sexual assaults are approximately five times more likely to have a nervous breakdown, six times more likely to think seriously about suicide, and eight times more likely to attempt suicide, than women who have not been sexually assaulted.<sup>21</sup>

Many women also experience significant economic hardship as the result of personal crimes of violence. Women are more likely to be poor; as a result, legal expenses, medical expenses not covered by insurance, or even costs of repairing their home damaged in the course of an assault can be prohibitive. As well, many battered women are forced to leave their husbands/partners to escape the abuse, leaving behind their homes, possessions, and the men's partial or complete financial support.

## **2. The escalation of women's fear**

Perhaps the most pervasive and widespread cost of violence against women is the escalation of fear for their safety, which severely circumscribes their lives and exaggerates their inequality. At least 50% of women in Canada are afraid to walk on their own streets at night.<sup>22</sup> Certainly this high level of fear is related in part to direct experiences of violence. People who have recently been victims of violent crimes are more likely to believe that neighbourhood crime rates are high and that crime is increasing, particularly in their own neighbourhoods.<sup>23</sup>



The nature of women's fear clearly indicates that actual experiences of physical or sexual violence are not the only factors which increase women's fear levels. In a series of community workshops sponsored by Secretary of State Canada in 1990, women spoke of the range of their fears. These included fears of sexual assault outside the home by a male stranger or slight acquaintance as well as physical and/or sexual assault in the home by a husband or partner. But women's fear also included:

- the fear of being unprotected by the justice system;
- the fear of being assaulted physically or sexually by police (this fear was particularly pronounced for Aboriginal and other racial and ethnic minority women);
- the fear of people in authority more generally, including church leaders, health-care workers, social workers, and lawyers;
- the fear of being isolated by geography, lack of knowledge, illiteracy, language, racism, or the lack of people's concern for one another;
- the fear of intolerance and racism;
- the fear that their children will not be safe;
- the fear of sexual harassment and physical or sexual assault in the workplace;
- the fear of prevalent portrayals of violence against women through the media, through sexist or implicitly violent advertising and through the widespread availability of pornography;
- the fear of men generally;
- the fear of living in a violent society.

The range of fears identified by women clearly demonstrates that women's fears are integrally linked to their daily experiences of inequality and isolation. Women also experience isolation and inequality as forms of violence. The more vulnerable and unequal a woman feels, the more fearful she is likely to be. Accordingly, the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey found that:

[l]ow income families, the less well educated, and those who live in high density housing were somewhat more fearful, but the greatest concentration of fear was among elderly people and women.<sup>24</sup>

Fear has the potential to isolate and effectively imprison women in their own homes. Women who are fearful tend to withdraw from social contacts and to impose restrictions on their actions. Women try to protect themselves by choosing to stay in at night, by changing their appearance, and by isolating themselves from unknown social contacts. Through these actions, women implicitly take responsibility both for their own potential victimization and for their own protection. Thus, violence against women "has the cumulative effect of reinforcing social norms about appropriate behaviour for women".<sup>25</sup> Women choose to change themselves, to "keep their place". Women become cautious about new experiences, they begin to accept that they can't go out without a male escort. As a result, violence against women reinforces women's inequality and the overall political, social, and economic undermining of women's power over their own lives.

### **3. The psychological costs to women of the related victimization of their children**

In addition to the direct physical injuries, the psychological damage, the economic consequences, and the escalation of fear, it is important to remember that women victims of violence also suffer through the related victimization of their children, particularly those who are abused by their husbands or partners.

In a CACSW national study of women who had been battered by their husbands, the women also reported that their partners had abused their children physically (26%), psychologically (48%), and sexually (7%).<sup>26</sup> The abuse of their children usually has devastating psychological effects on the woman which plague her even if she removes the children from the abuse.

### **4. The costs to communities and to society as a whole**

Women, men, and children in our society all pay for violence against women, both economically and socially. We all pay financially for the police intervention needed to protect women, for lawyers and courts to process these crimes, for health care needed to treat the women's injuries, for counselling

and support services for the women and children, and for transition houses which are often the only places women can go when they are in danger.

These costs represent only the tip of the iceberg. They do not include many added hidden costs of violence against women. We pay for days lost from work when women are too physically and psychologically injured to function. We pay for justice, health, and social services to deal with their children when they go missing, or prostitute themselves, or attempt suicide in an effort to escape the violence they witness in their homes. We pay for long-term counselling for women victims of violence and for their children. We pay for special education classes for children too traumatized to learn. We pay for prisons housing those who have been victimized by violence and who respond to their own pain with violence against others.

The social costs of violence and fear are even more devastating. When fearful women isolate themselves and withdraw from community life in an effort to protect themselves, communities begin to die. Women are still the "keepers of the community"; for example, they tend to volunteer for social and health programs, support the parent/teachers' associations, and run after-school programs for children. As women become more fearful, they also keep their children inside; commerce is affected as women shop less and eat out less in the evenings. Streets become emptier and more welcoming for criminals. Eventually, with the escalation of fear, communities become more visibly divided between rich and poor; urban sprawl develops as the "rich" move to what they perceive as "safer" areas. Ultimately, the vitality of communities is eroded.<sup>27</sup>

Violence against women escalates the fear, the crime, the destruction, the suffering in our society. It creates guilty secrets, it isolates, it fragments families, it fragments communities. We pay with social disorganization, violent crime, lack of trust, fear of others, and a general loss of control over social order.



## NAMING THE VIOLENCE

### What Factors Contribute to Violence Against Women?

The extent of the physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence against women, combined with its unique patterns and effects, demonstrates that violence is firmly entrenched in our society. Male violence against women is strongly rooted in the values and attitudes which perpetuate women's inequality.

In fact, surveys done in the United States have found a high tolerance for violence, particularly by men against their partners. M.A. Straus found in 1980 that just under one in three husbands thought that slapping one's partner was "normal" behaviour.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, C.S. Greenblat found that 41% of men and 16% of women surveyed gave at least one circumstance under which they would consider hitting as an appropriate behaviour for husbands.<sup>29</sup>

On a common sense level, we all know that traits of competitiveness, "positive aggressiveness", and assertiveness are highly valued. In particular, men are taught to "be in control", a characteristic which is strongly valued by men who abuse their wives.<sup>30</sup> In our society, powerful people are people who have power over others. This power can be controlling, aggressive, and lead to psychologically violent behaviour which is often rewarded in our culture, particularly for men.

We live in a hierarchical society, and women generally are not at the top. Currently, the vast majority of women are part of the group that is controlled by those higher up in the hierarchy, who tend to be men. The belief that a few must control the many is part of an ethic of domination, on which authority and power in our society is based. This ethic, according to Lorraine Berzins,

. . . has allowed men to dominate women, parents to spank children, one class or race to devalue and control another. It unleashes competition to gain and maintain power in the hierarchy. And we have come to believe that this is morally right because the "other" is of inferior rank in our hierarchy of values — due to gender, age, race, physical, mental or economic difference . . . The 'right' to use violence, if necessary, to maintain that domination is based on our belief that it is morally right to do so for the sake of preserving order, and is made easier by the belief that the other is of inferior ability, responsibility or status.<sup>31</sup>

In the past, this structural analysis was often dismissed as too radical and was considered too global to lead to any practical solutions. However, attempts to find other factors which cause or contribute to violence against women have frequently reached the same conclusion, i.e., while other factors such as stress, substance abuse, lack of support systems, or psychological factors may be linked in some way to men's violence against women, these factors do not adequately explain violence unless put in the larger context of values and attitudes which condone and perpetuate violence against women.

The most recent attempts to develop a paradigm to explain the roots of violence have been labelled the "ecological approach". Don Dutton, one of the theorists who has put forth such a paradigm, suggests a "nested ecological approach".<sup>32</sup> This theory postulates that violence against women is the result of the interaction of: beliefs and values which condone violence against women; individual stress and lack of support for individuals and families in our society; power-based patterns of behaviour; and an individual history as well as a psychological make-up which predisposes the aggressor to violent behaviour.

### **Looking at Violence Against Women More Holistically**

The above elaboration of the nature of violence against women in our society clearly demonstrates that women are overwhelmingly the victims and men the perpetrators of violence. Violence against women is rooted in control. And violence against women is perpetuated by the fact that women do not have power in our society. The economic, political, and social inequality

of women both fuels and justifies violence against women in a society which values power and control. Therefore, Barbara Appleford concludes that violence against women is generally an abuse of power by a man "who is dominant by virtue of physical strength or family role."<sup>33</sup> This abuse of power, together with the less overt but equally dangerous forms of psychological, economic, and verbal abuse, has devastating consequences. As the Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women in Canada have recognized, the combination is "depriving many women of their ability to achieve equality".<sup>34</sup>

For women, the violence they experience extends beyond direct, separate incidents of physical and sexual violence to include ongoing psychological violence. It also includes the psychological violence women suffer in their daily experiences outside the home, in a society in which they are treated unequally, and in which violence against them is subtly or overtly condoned.

Women often experience so-called "aid" programs as doubly victimizing because these services and programs operate within, and reflect, society's unequal framework. Certain groups of women are especially affected because the violence is so integrally tied to women's inequality. Disabled women, Aboriginal women, racial and ethnic minority women, senior women, and all women who are even more disadvantaged than white, young or middle-aged women, frequently suffer the most psychological and economic devastation through violence. As well, they are often the least likely to seek outside help and have difficulty finding culturally-sensitive services.

In our society, the prevalent responses to violence continue to focus on physical and sexual violence only, and do little or nothing to address or reverse the inequality which is so much a part of women's reality. Too many responses to violence do not reflect the experiences of women and simply reinforce their knowledge that they are unequal and powerless.



The justice system, with its hierarchical and adversarial orientation, is one example. Women frequently experience the justice system as alienating, oppressive, and psychologically violent despite attempts to build in supports for women victims of violence. Here are the anguished words of one woman who, after being abused and calling the police, lost her children, was divorced by her husband, and forced to go on welfare:

Why did I ever call the police? They took my family, my home, my security, my dignity, and my belief in what's right. I would rather be beaten every day of my life by my husband than have a bunch of strangers take my life away without even asking.

Concerted efforts have been made to make police and Crown Attorneys more sensitive to women who have been assaulted by their husbands. For example, guidelines developed to encourage police to charge men who assault their wives have been adopted across the country. However, many women still do not believe that the police can do anything meaningful to help them.<sup>35</sup> Because of their fear and distrust about going to court, they beg Crown Attorneys to drop the case and, in some instances, have even risked being charged with contempt of court by refusing to testify.

Women victims of violence clearly expressed their expectations of the criminal justice system in a Department of Justice study exploring innovative justice approaches to wife assault. Women informed the researchers that they wanted the justice system to uphold their innocence, to proclaim their worth as people, and to publicly acknowledge the injustice that had been done to them. Women said they wanted the justice system to publicly assert their equality as people and their right to live free from violence.<sup>36</sup>

Across Canada, many efforts are being made by a variety of professional groups to respond more sensitively and effectively to women who have experienced violence. However, women will continue to experience these programs and services as psychologically violent as long as agencies focus primarily or solely on the physical and sexual violence without working to

reduce the inequality which keeps women fearful, vulnerable, and without real choice.

## **FINDING EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS**

The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women strongly believes that any attempt to prevent violence against women must focus on the context of women's inequality. Efforts must work explicitly to reduce this inequality, not just to reduce the physical and sexual violence against women. Further, the Council firmly maintains that any attempt to prevent violence against women must respond to women's needs and must be rooted in women's experiences and wisdom.

### **What Do Women Want and Need to Prevent Violence?**

Studies of women who have been abused by their husbands or partners, or sexually assaulted by a stranger or acquaintance, consistently identify a number of general needs.<sup>37</sup> These needs are not limited only to women survivors of physical or sexual assault. They also express the concerns of the broader population of women, all of whom have suffered to some extent the violence of inequality, oppression, and discrimination.

#### **1. Inclusion**

Women want to be a truly integral part of the communities and societies in which they live. Violence isolates. Women will come to fear violence less, and the violence against them will be reduced only when women become equal, respected, and involved partners in society.

## **2. Validation**

Women want to be respected and not stereotyped. Women want to be seen as credible, and to have their experiences and feelings validated. This requires people in positions of authority to consistently show — through their words, attitudes, and actions — that they believe violence against women is wrong. Women also expect validation by being listened to by those who offer support. They want to be assured that they are not alone in their suffering, they want to be helped to believe that they are not responsible for the violence, they want their privacy to be respected if they request this right, and they want to be taken seriously by people in positions of authority.

## **3. Protection**

Women who have been the victims of violence, or who fear violence, want the reassurance that they have the choice to go to a safe place. They also want to know that the police will come promptly if called, that the criminal justice system will be available and effective if women want to use it, and that people in the community will come to the assistance of women in danger.

## **4. Honest, complete, and realistic information**

Women want honest, realistic, and complete information about violence against women, and about the options open to them, in order to help them make informed decisions about their futures.

## **5. Men's responsibility**

Women demand that men who are violent against women take responsibility for their violent actions. Although women know that not all men are violent, women want and expect all men to be part of the solution. Women want all men to acknowledge that violence against women is serious and unacceptable. Women want all men to take some responsibility for changing the structures and values that perpetuate male violence. Women want all men



to share the work to help prevent violence and to reduce the devastating impacts of violence against women.

## **6. Just treatment**

Women want and need fair and just treatment by people in the justice, health and social service sectors, by voluntary sector groups, and by the community as a whole. Women want to know that they are considered equal and that they will be treated equally and fairly in whatever choices they make.

## **7. Empowerment**

Women need to assert their desire for independence and interdependence. Women want to effect change in their own lives, using their strength, abilities, and experience. Finally, women want the opportunities, made possible through a more equal society, to create their futures.

## **Recommendations and Proposals for Action**

The following recommendations and proposals are organized according to the first four major needs of women summarized above. Just treatment and empowerment are included as well, but as over-riding principles which envelop all the other more specific needs and also form the basis of the analysis of this brief. Similarly, although men's responsibility is not addressed directly, the Council strongly believes that men must take responsibility for their own violence. The Council also maintains that women must have a leadership role in the formulation and implementation of all the recommendations and proposals discussed in this brief.

Where a proposal rather than a recommendation is made, this distinction indicates a recognized need for action, flowing out of past Council recommendations or reflecting current Council concerns. It is a need which has not yet been approved by Council members in the form of an updated recommendation.

## **1. The Need for Inclusion**

### **a. The need for a royal commission on violence against women**

In our society, violence against women is a multifaceted and complex issue which requires a multifaceted solution, including structural change.

#### **THE CACSW PROPOSES**

**that a royal commission on violence against women be, created, as proposed by the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario.**

The Council believes that this royal commission would help increase knowledge and action concerning violence against women, validate women's experiences, create a forum to look at violence within the context of women's inequality, and ensure that violence is never again denied to be important or widespread.

The Council also believes that such a commission could help shift the focus of public concern toward truly preventive action and could expand the accepted definition of violence against women to include psychological, economic, and structural violence as well as physical and sexual violence. The Council strongly hopes that such a commission would display the courage to deal with the structural and attitudinal roots of inequality; these are no longer too large or optional in our approaches to prevention. As a society, we have no choice but to face the ethic of domination and control which condones and perpetuates violence against women.

The Council also hopes that a royal commission on violence against women would explore and make known the wide range of innovative approaches which are being taken and/or could be taken at the community level. These include:

- the need for education on and application of conflict resolution in the schools, in the workplace, on the media, through churches, and through private service clubs;

- the positive role churches could play in public education around the facts of violence and the values and structures which perpetuate and create violence, as well as the role the churches could play in creating community support for women and children who are victims/survivors of violence, and in creating community acceptance of responsibility for preventing the violence;
- the importance of employers being both alert to the financial and social costs of violence against women to their organizations and receptive to the contributions employers could make to prevent the violence, including financially supporting treatment programs for men who batter as well as support groups for women and their children;
- the potential for men's service clubs to help change values which condone violence and which undervalue women, and more generally to encourage men to become part of the solution to prevent violence against women;
- the possibility of child-care centres, pre-school play groups, and nursery schools teaching non-aggressive conflict resolution and more positive ways for males and females to interact;
- the range of ways that existing community-based services could work together in multi-disciplinary, multi-agency approaches to promote more consistent, fair, and empowering responses to women who are victims/survivors of violence, to their children, and to their violent partners.

The Council also hopes that a royal commission on violence against women would explore in depth the continuing responsibilities of all levels of government for public education, support for community-based services, and research into factors which escalate and/or perpetuate violence against women. In particular, the Council suggests that the royal commission investigate the advisability of launching a massive public education campaign similar to the Participaction or the Smoke-Free Living campaigns.

The royal commission must include representatives of women's groups, and hold lengthy consultations with women's groups not represented on the commission. All these groups must be involved in both the planning and implementation stages of the commission. In addition, the commission must ensure that funds used for the royal commission do not, in any way, jeopardize funding for women's groups or services across Canada.



## **b. Providing coordinated responses**

The need for inclusion encompasses the need to avoid victimization through the fragmentation of services and information. The past few years have witnessed the growth of community-based coordinating committees, and the beginnings of interdisciplinary cooperation among professionals and voluntary sector workers. Nonetheless, a concerted effort to promote coordination is still needed.

THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN DECEMBER 1987:

that the federal government encourage the creation of multi-agency resource centres where women can receive advice, support, counselling and referrals on issues of battering;

that the federal government encourage the establishment of a Community Coordinating Committee on Family Violence in every community where there is a transition house.

## **2. The Need for Validation**

### **a. Naming the problem**

As the Council stated in its recommendations of April 1980, there is still "a tendency in the federal government to place wife battering under family violence, thus de-emphasizing the problems and needs of battered women". More generally, through statistical collection practices which do not allow for the disaggregation of data by gender, men's violence against women is hidden in more generic categories like "violent crimes".

THE CACSW PROPOSES:

that the federal government recognize male violence against women as a priority area in its own right, and that all statistical collection undertaken or influenced by the federal government be reviewed and where necessary revised to allow for the clear recognition of male violence against women.

**b. Support for women's organizations is essential**

Over the past decade, women's organizations have found themselves increasingly vulnerable in terms of funding and community support. Even where funding has increased, the amounts do not cover the full cost of services provided to women in their communities. Furthermore, the organizations do not have predictable, long-term funding that allows them to efficiently plan their programs and services.

**THE CACSW PROPOSES:**

**that the federal government and, in particular, the Women's Program at the Department of the Secretary of State ensure that women's programs working to increase women's equality and to reduce women's vulnerability and victimization be given adequate long-term financial support that covers service delivery, and be consulted in policy and program development.**

**THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, IN KEEPING WITH ONE SECTION OF A RECOMMENDATION PASSED IN APRIL 1980:**

**that the Women's Program at the Department of the Secretary of State be allocated increased funding to support women's organizations working on wife battering.**

**c. Validating the experiences of doubly disadvantaged women**

The CACSW acknowledges that some attempts have been made by federal government departments to respond to the needs of women who are doubly disadvantaged. For example, the Department of Employment and Immigration is launching a new program to encourage more effective service delivery and support for immigrant and refugee women who are battered. Nonetheless, women living in rural or isolated areas, Aboriginal, immigrant, racial and ethnic minority, lesbian, teenage, senior women, and women with disabilities as well as women living on military bases continue to face even greater obstacles in trying to deal with violence against women.

THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN SEPTEMBER 1987:

that the federal government provide, where appropriate, shelters and/or support services which are designed to meet the special needs of rural, isolated, Aboriginal, immigrant, racial and ethnic minority, teenage, older women and women with disabilities as well as women living on military bases; and

that the federal government provide special funds to shelters for the provision of services to women facing cultural or language barriers, including hiring translators and those proficient in sign language, as needed, to help workers communicate with women who speak neither of Canada's official languages.

THE CACSW PROPOSES:

that members of doubly disadvantaged groups be hired as staff in rape crisis shelters, transition houses, and other organizations providing services to women.

d. Reducing demeaning portrayals of women

Women across Canada still report that their fear levels are increased by the ubiquitous and relentless display of materials and television/radio programs which present women in a violent, demeaning, or discriminatory way.

THE CACSW REITERATES ITS STATEMENT ON PORNOGRAPHY MADE IN THE CONTEXT OF A RECOMMENDATION PASSED IN DECEMBER 1984:

The CACSW condemns any presentation in which persons are portrayed in an exploitative, degrading or dehumanizing way, or violated physically or psychologically, and in which such behaviour can be taken to be advocated or endorsed.

THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN DECEMBER 1985, WHEN REFERRING TO ITS RESPONSE TO THE FRASER COMMITTEE REPORT ON PORNOGRAPHY AND PROSTITUTION:

that the Council. . . (indicate) its position that violent and degrading pornography is a barrier to women's full social and economic inequality.



THE CACSW PROPOSES, AS A FOLLOW-UP TO ITS RECOMMENDATION ON FREE TRADE AND PORNOGRAPHY PASSED IN DECEMBER 1987:

that the federal government closely monitor the free trade agreement with the United States to ensure that pornography is effectively controlled and deterred.

### **3. The Need For Protection**

#### **a. The continuing need for support of transition houses**

In 1980, the CACSW first recommended comprehensive funding support for transition houses and stressed the need for adequate financing of programs within and/or affiliated with transition houses. Subsequently, funding to transition houses has increased significantly in some provinces/territories. As well, some provinces/territories provide block funding to transition houses, and programs such as child care and outreach are commonly found in transition houses in some provinces/territories.

Nonetheless:

- transition houses in many locations have no such programs and, where they provide such services, must manage them solely on volunteer help;<sup>38</sup>
- in many locations, transition-house staff still spend as much as one-third of their time fundraising to compensate for inadequate government support;
- despite limited or no program dollars, transition-house workers feel an increasing responsibility to implement a growing number of focused programs (e.g., programs responding to the special needs of immigrant and refugee women) because they are not being developed or implemented by government or groups in the community;
- when transition houses obtain federal funds for programs, they are often forced to apply for funds under programs which carry with them a maximum time limit of three years.

**THE CACSW PROPOSES, IN KEEPING WITH THE SPIRIT OF ITS 1980 RECOMMENDATION:**

**that Health and Welfare Canada undertake a feasibility study for completion and public release by September 1991 on innovative federal funding possibilities (not constrained by fixed time limits or by the stipulation that the program be "innovative" and therefore not duplicated elsewhere in Canada) for support, outreach, and prevention programs to operate out of or in affiliation with transition houses.**

**THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN APRIL 1978:**

**that the federal government give priority and consistency to the funding of rape crisis centres.**

**b. The continuing need for more effective police protection**

In 1980, the Council urged the federal government to fund studies to ensure that the justice system protect women more effectively. Although progress has been made in terms of police training and more aggressive charging policies, many women still feel that the police are not able to give them the protection they need. The Council is aware that the federal government has funded studies which address, in part, the issues raised below. Nonetheless, the potential for justice system models which truly reflect the needs and wishes of women who are victims/survivors of violence has not been fully explored to the satisfaction of women's groups working in this area.

**THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN APRIL 1980:**

**that studies be funded by the Departments of the Solicitor General and Justice, in consultation with women's groups, to explore more innovative options for dealing with wife battering, such as:**

- a) the development of a model of protection provided by the police;**
- b) the development of a model to make restraining orders an effective tool to protect women;**
- c) the development of a model of alternative sentencing options in cases of wife battering.**

The Council is also concerned that overall modes of police and justice system intervention are designed to respond to the patterns of male violence against men which tend to be discrete incidents of stranger or acquaintance violence in a public place. The responses to these patterns of violence do not speak to women's experiences of violence and apparently do not effectively prevent violence against women.

**THE CACSW PROPOSES:**

that the federal government — through police training colleges, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, and the Department of the Solicitor General — encourage police to look carefully at the known patterns of violence against women and undertake studies to develop protection and prevention measures which respond explicitly to these patterns of repeated, ongoing violence in women's homes by people known to them.

**4. The Need for Honest, Complete, and Realistic Information**

**a. Sharing information on the effectiveness of programs for men who batter**

Many women who are abused by their husbands want counselling for their partners. In 1987, the CACSW recommended that the relevant federal government departments undertake a comprehensive evaluation of all such existing programs; such an evaluation was undertaken, but the results have not been released.

**THE CACSW PROPOSES:**

that the results of evaluations of counselling programs for men who batter, carried out by federal government departments, be released to the public.



**b. Ensuring that available services are known**

The level of awareness about violence against women and available services has grown phenomenally over the past decade. However, illiteracy, lack of knowledge of where to obtain information, and visual or hearing disabilities prevent some women and men in Canada from gaining access to needed information on available services related to violence against women.

**THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN DECEMBER 1987:**

**that the federal government commission a series of television ads, in the form of [close-captioned and heavily visual] public service announcements, on services available for the victims and the batterers.**

**c. Improving our understanding of the justice system**

The Council has been monitoring research conducted by the Department of Justice to evaluate the impact of sexual assault legislation introduced in 1983. Our preliminary assessment of that research indicates that the new legislation has not achieved its objective of increased reporting by adult female sexual assault victims, nor has it significantly improved the processing of complaints of sexual assault within the criminal justice system. However, it is arguable that the failure lies not with the legislation itself, but with its implementation.<sup>39</sup>

**THE CACSW PROPOSES:**

**that the Department of Justice, in consultation with women's groups, undertake specific, focused research to evaluate the performance of the justice system's response to sexual assault.**

**d. Improving our understanding of male violence against women**

Our knowledge about discrete forms of violence against women has grown considerably in the past few years. However, as a society we are only now beginning to explore the overlap across forms of violence, the factors that contribute to violence, and the particular experiences of doubly disadvantaged women.

THE CACSW RECOMMENDS, AS IT DID IN SEPTEMBER 1976:

that further study be done on violent crimes and especially those of a sexual nature.

**CONCLUSION**

Violence against women is a women's issue, a men's issue, and society's issue. It speaks to the very survival of the ideals of equality, justice, and fairness. As a society, we are experiencing increased fragmentation, intolerance, isolation, and fear. We are recognizing that men's violence against women, and the more generalized violence of which it is a part, can no longer be ignored.

If we are to ensure that women and children as well as men have the right to live free from violence, we must have the courage to change our hierarchical institutions. We must have the strength to turn toward cooperative ways of interacting, rather than the traditional competitive model. We must have the vision to share our experiences, our wisdom, and our power. Increasingly, women and men are recognizing the need to

. . . consolidate rather than fragment ourselves as individuals and societies . . . Together let us begin to talk about a journey towards a new consciousness, for both women and men . . . [T]o grow beyond our divisiveness, our alienation from ourselves, each other and our very environment, nothing short of a revolution of consciousness is needed.<sup>40</sup>

## NOTES

1. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW) has published three major titles on wife battering: Linda MacLeod, *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle* (Ottawa: CACSW, 1980); Linda MacLeod, *Battered But Not Beaten: Preventing Wife Battering in Canada* (Ottawa: CACSW, 1987); and Linda MacLeod, *Preventing Wife Battering: Towards a New Understanding* (Ottawa: CACSW, 1989).
2. Julie Brickman and John Briere, "Incidence of Rape and Sexual Assault in an Urban Canadian Population", *International Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 7, no. 3 (May/June 1984).
3. This figure was first reported in MacLeod, *Wife Battering in Canada*, *supra*, note 1. Subsequently, this figure has been corroborated through a national survey using a scientific sample reported by Eugen Lupri, "Male Violence in the Home", *Canadian Social Trends*, no. 14 (Autumn 1989), pp. 19-21.
4. See MacLeod, *Battered But Not Beaten*, *supra*, note 1, pp. 17-18, for a brief discussion of husband abuse.
5. Figure calculated from Canada, Solicitor General Canada, "Female Victims of Crime", *Canadian Urban Victimization Survey*, Bulletin 4 (1985), p. 4.
6. The total number of sexual assaults was taken from Uniform Crime Reporting Statistics provided by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. The estimate that at least 90% of these sexual assaults involved women is reported in Canada, Solicitor General Canada, "Female Victims of Crime", *ibid.*, note 5, p. 2.
7. Homicide Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Ottawa.
8. Uniform Crime Reporting Survey, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Ottawa.
9. Canada, Solicitor General Canada, "Female Victims of Crime", *supra*, note 5, p. 5.
10. Linda MacLeod, *The City for Women: No Safe Place* (Ottawa: Secretary of State, 1989), p. 14.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Canada, Solicitor General Canada, "Female Victims of Crime", *supra*, note 5, p. 6.
13. Ontario Native Women's Association, *Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change in Aboriginal Family Violence* (Thunder Bay, Ont.: 1989).



14. Canada, Health and Welfare Canada, *Working Together: 1989 National Forum on Family Violence — Proceedings* (Ottawa: 1989), p. 41.
15. Canada, Correctional Services Canada, Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women, *Creating Choices: Report of the Task Force on Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: 1990), p. 52.
16. The estimate of one million women was made by Linda MacLeod, in *Battered But Not Beaten*, *supra*, note 1. This figure has been supported in the work of Eugen Lupri cited in note 3.
17. Holly Johnson, *Women and Crime in Canada* (Ottawa: Solicitor General Canada, 1986), p. 25.
18. Canada, Solicitor General Canada, "Female Victims of Crime", *supra*, note 5, p. 5.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
21. Margaret T. Gordon and Stephanie Riger, *The Female Fear* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), p. 16.
22. The Canadian Urban Victimization Survey found that 56% of women in seven urban cities felt unsafe when walking alone in their own neighbourhoods after dark, compared to 18% of men. (Reported in Toronto Transit Commission METRAC, *Moving Forward*, *supra*, note 2, p. 15.)
23. Canada, Solicitor General Canada, "Crime Prevention Awareness and Practice", *Canadian Urban Victimization Survey*, Bulletin 3 (1984), p. 2.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
25. Gordon and Riger, *The Female Fear*, *supra*, note 21, p. 122.
26. MacLeod, *Battered But Not Beaten*, *supra*, note 1, p. 32.
27. Wesley Skogan quoted in Mark H. Moore and Robert C. Trojanowicz, "Policing and the Fear of Crime", in United States, National Institute of Justice and John F. Kennedy School of Government, Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, *Perspectives on Policing*, no. 3 (Washington, D.C.: The Institute, 1988), p. 3.
28. Barbara Appleford, *Family Violence Review: Prevention and Treatment of Abusive Behaviour* (Ottawa: Correctional Services Canada, 1989), p. 9. This reference provides an excellent summary of theories and research related to factors associated with violence against women.
29. *Ibid.*

30. This trait has been acknowledged in much of the writing on woman abuse. For example, see the kit produced by the Church Council on Justice and Corrections and the Canadian Council on Social Development entitled *Family Violence in a Patriarchal Society: A Challenge to our Way of Living* (Ottawa: 1990).
31. Canada, Health and Welfare Canada, *Working Together*, *supra*, note 14, p. 34.
32. Appleford, *Family Violence Review*, *supra*, note 28, p. 13.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
34. Lake Louise Declaration, *On Violence Against Women*, by Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, May 31, 1990, Lake Louise, Alberta.
35. Holly Johnson, "Wife Abuse", *Canadian Social Trends* (Spring 1988), p. 19.
36. Linda MacLeod and Cheryl Picard, "Toward a More Effective Criminal Justice Response to Wife Assault: Exploring the Limits and Potential of Effective Intervention", Working Paper WD-1990 1A, prepared for the Department of Justice, Canada, 1989. Available on request only.
37. The needs summarized in this section are synthesized from the three major CACSW publications on wife abuse, cited in note 1.
38. Information on transition houses and other services for women who are battered reported in this section was gathered by Linda MacLeod both through the research she conducted for the Council in 1979, 1986, and 1989 (see note 1), and through interviews and workshops she conducted in 1990 across the country with a variety of shelter workers and other service providers who work with battered women.
39. Lorene M.G. Clark, "An Evaluation of the Research Commissioned by the Federal Department of Justice to Assess the Impact of Bill C-127" (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, forthcoming, 1991).
40. Quotes taken from the President's Message in Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Researching for Equality: The CACSW 1990-93 Action Plan* (Ottawa: 1990), p. 4.





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